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ABSTRACT

Topics covered include the definition of giftedness, screening and identification procedures, goals and objectives of programming for the gifted, differentiating the curriculum, preparing the staff, and allocating resources. Ten recommendations are listed including the need for school districts to establish districtwide committees to develop procedures for early screening and identification of the gifted and talented in New York State. (LS)

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EDUCATING THE GIFTED AND TALENTED IN NEW YORK STATE

A Statement of Policy
and Proposed Action
by the
REGENTS OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF THE
STATE OF NEW YORK

THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
ALBANY
JANUARY 1976

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FOREWORD

A measure of the greatness of an educational system is the extent to which it is able to provide a complete education for all of the individuals in its care. A universal system of education is ultimately tested at its margins.

The State educational system functions very well in educating the vast numbers of students in the middle, the so-called normal range of ability; but official and public enthusiasm and support are often less generous when the gifted and other exceptional students on the fringes are singled out for special or differentiated treatment. Thus, such students often do not receive true equality of opportunity for growth.

In this Bicentennial Year, it is appropriate to note that Thomas Jefferson insisted that the only natural aristocracy among men is grounded on talent. In fairness, we must honor those able students whose eventual membership in that natural aristocracy can be anticipated in their early years, by according them equal opportunity for growth commensurate with their capabilities.

Equal opportunity does not mean the same length or type of education for everyone. True equality consists in treating unequal talents unequally.

We must identify gifted and talented students early and nurture their fullest development as individuals and members of the community, the State and the Nation. We can afford to do no less; their achievement and the progress of society depend upon our success in this endeavor.

I join the Regents in this statement of commitment to the gifted and talented and call upon the State's educational community, organizations and institutions, as well as parents and other concerned individuals, to join us in making our commitment a reality.

Ewald B. Nyquist

President of The University and
Commissioner of Education

INTRODUCTION

Meeting the educational needs of gifted and talented pupils is a recurring nationwide concern. This was evidenced by a report to Congress in 1971 entitled, *Education of the Gifted and Talented*, which strongly urged intervention on behalf of the gifted and talented. Because these pupils have the ability to make rich contributions to our culture and society, developing their individual abilities and building on their unique strengths becomes a matter of great importance.

The State of New York has consistently urged school districts to plan and develop programs which meet the needs of all children. Educators at the local level have accepted the challenge of providing programs for those whose physical, mental or emotional capabilities are limited. Now, each school district is urged to identify its gifted and talented, those pupils who are exceptional because of their extraordinary capabilities. Aided by action of the Executive Branch and the State Legislature, the State Education Department has already taken a major step in this direction. Funds have been allocated to establish the New York State Summer School of the Arts for 500 of the State's most highly talented students. This will enable the Department to continue the six-year-old School of Orchestral Studies and to add Schools of Theatre, Ballet and Modern Dance, Visual Arts, Film/Media and Choral Studies. Nationally known artists and artistic groups will provide instruction in each school.

It is recognized that some districts already provide honors classes, independent study programs, Advanced Placement courses and enrichment activities for secondary students with high academic aptitudes. For some elementary pupils provisions have been made through differentiated approaches and programming. However, these provisions have reached only a small percentage of the estimated 200,000 gifted and talented pupils enrolled in New York State schools. Increased effort is needed. Professional staff must be prepared, community awareness and knowledge increased, appropriate programs designed, and resources allocated to meet the needs of all New York State's gifted and talented.

IDENTIFYING THE GIFTED AND TALENTED

The Importance of Identification

The importance of identifying gifted and talented pupils is well recognized. When they are identified and placed in appropriate programs, their accomplishments exceed, both in quantity and quality, those of pupils from the general population. Examples of distinguished performance which have had lasting impact on all aspects of our society can be found. However, in all parts of the country, large numbers of gifted and talented remain unidentified and unrecognized throughout their school careers.

As a group, they constitute an unidentified minority that cuts across all economic, social, racial and cultural segments of society. They can be found at all ages, in all occupations and in both sexes. Identification of the five percent of the school population comprising this group is a basic and vital step if society is to reap the benefits that these exceptional individuals can provide.

A Definition

Before the identification process can begin, an understanding of who the gifted and talented are is necessary. The definition suggested by the U.S. Office of Education in its August 1971 Report is:

> Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who, by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children *who require differentiated programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program* in order to realize their contribution to self and society.

This broad definition must be further refined to reflect the multifaceted dimensions of their abilities and competencies. These dimensions include *demonstrated* or *potential* abilities in the areas of:

- general intelligence
- specific academic aptitude
- creative or productive thinking
- leadership
- the visual or performing arts
- psychomotor activities

Abilities within these areas do not usually appear in isolation. The gifted and talented as a group can be expected to possess varied as well as specific abilities, interests, and talents, which are complex

and advanced far beyond the ordinary. In order to meet the complex and unique challenges of providing a program for these pupils, *it is important to focus on those with truly outstanding abilities and exceptional potential.*

Research, beginning early in this century, has identified certain traits which tend to characterize the gifted. They include quickness to learn, depth of understanding, independence, originality of thought and exceptional skill at communication. In addition, the gifted explore ideas at an earlier age than their peers and tend toward activities involving intellectual skills. They deal with broad concepts and produce creatively at greatly advanced levels. They frequently show interest in social, human and spiritual problems sooner than others of the same age, becoming concerned with issues of morality, religion, aesthetic expression and values when quite young. They are able to express themselves in a variety of ways, by drawing on their many interests and abilities. Individually, some of the gifted and talented may be "loners" or "eccentric" but as a group they perform well in widely varied organizations such as community groups or athletic teams, as studies by Lewis Terman and others have shown.

Verbal ability and communicative skills are categories in which gifted and talented persons particularly tend to excel. Vital to human thought and progress, these abilities and skills need to be developed and refined at high levels. It must be taken into account, of course, that some children and youth in New York State schools will demonstrate their verbal ability and communicative skills in a language other than English.

Not every gifted person has all the characteristics discussed here; nor are these characteristics apparent at every stage of development. While definitions vary, most include aspects of giftedness listed above. It is important for each school district to consider carefully the definition of giftedness it plans to use before planning a screening and identification program. How giftedness and talent are defined will also guide the development of the variety of programming which may be needed.

Screening and Identification Procedures

A reliable, comprehensive screening and identification program for gifted and talented children has the following characteristics: early identification, continuing search, involvement of various professionals, use of multiple resource materials, and complete study and information on the abilities of the gifted and talented pupils.

Gifted and talented children should be identified at the time of school entry, with programming being planned for them as early as possible. This is a crucial time for young children whose attitudes, motivation and future learning will be shaped by their early experiences. Thousands of gifted children who enter school with high motivation and great anticipation soon experience frustration and boredom. Eventually, they come to regard school as dull and uninteresting. Dropping out, underachievement, and disenchantment with learning are among the results. If choices must be made, it is of critical importance to identify the gifted early and involve them immediately in appropriate programming.

Diagnosis of the child's abilities and potentials must be a continuous process. There are significant reasons why repeated testing and subjective appraisals are necessary. At any given age level, a test score may not accurately reflect a child's capabilities. Even a qualified professional may misjudge a pupil's potential. Cultural, environmental, or language factors may obscure actual abilities or potentials.

Local responsibility for identification includes the involvement of various professionally qualified personnel including school administrators, psychologists and teachers as well as parents and special resource persons who are qualified to make such judgments. Students, too, may be involved through the use of checklists, interviews and sociometric devices.

The use of multiple resource materials and a variety of procedures for identification are required. As discussed above, the gifted and talented have multifaceted capabilities. Mental ability superior to that of the general population is one of the significant characteristics of a gifted and talented person but it would be a mistake to restrict the definition and identification procedures to this characteristic alone. Those who perform well on intelligence tests also tend to have many other abilities and talents that do not lend themselves as readily to measurement in a testing situation. It is estimated that the common means of identifying the gifted, that is, group tests and teacher observations, fail to identify half of the gifted population in the schools. Therefore, evidence should be broadly based and may be gathered from a variety of sources including:

- group and individual intelligence tests
- achievement tests
- aptitude tests
- creativity tests

- rating scales
- anecdotal records
- personality tests
- interest inventories
- records of counselors and others who have had frequent personal contact with the student
- observation of actual performance and special skills
- parental interviews
- peer judgment (sociometric) devices
- teacher nomination
- autobiography
- pupil products and work samples
- case studies

The identification of some gifted and talented children and youth may be hindered because they are disadvantaged in some way. Care is required to ensure that the abilities of children whose language is not English or whose speech patterns vary from standard English are accurately measured. Some devices for this purpose are available. Multiple criteria must also be the basis for identification of the gifted among those who may be disadvantaged because of their sex, economic deprivation, handicapping conditions, rural or urban living environments, and underachievement. Some pupils may also be disadvantaged because of their race or ethnic origin. Because these various forms of disadvantagement do exist, it is important that the schools make genuine efforts to ensure that *all* gifted and talented youngsters are appropriately identified and nurtured.

Complete study and information on the abilities of the gifted and talented child should be the rule. Before a measuring instrument is used, its validity for the particular purpose should be determined. Tests should be used within the context of a variety of other kinds of information.

The mere identification of giftedness does not accommodate the needs of the gifted. It does single out a population of children who possess highly advanced, complex abilities. It serves to alert teachers and other professionals to the potential of individuals, thus enabling them to plan for more effective programming.

Identification is of value to older children who have been poor achievers or problem students and to parents who wish to encourage children in their learning and education. Nevertheless, a comprehensive identification program is an imperative step in educational planning for the gifted and talented.

PROGRAMMING FOR THE GIFTED

Once the gifted and talented are identified, effective programming is required. This programming should take into account their emotional and social development along with their intellectual needs. The gifted and talented share common needs with other youngsters but they also have special needs. In particular, they should have opportunities to:

- acquire basic skills and explore ideas and issues earlier and more swiftly than their age-mates
- satisfy their unusually high desire for self-fulfillment
- find productive ways of expressing their unusual multiple talents and high capacity for versatility
- receive special guidance in making choices and plans appropriate to their different rates of personal growth and development
- be exposed to a wide variety of learning experiences in and out of a formal school setting.

In order to provide these opportunities, it is important to distinguish between provisions and programs. Schools often offer numerous provisions for their most capable pupils through enrichment or acceleration within regular classroom settings. Some schools and individual teachers make provisions for gifted and talented pupils through open classrooms, age groupings and other approaches. The result is, all too often, bright and colorful parts but no thread of continuity.

On the other hand, schools also offer programs. For instance, schools may have designed an academic curriculum which is used to facilitate progress of the gifted from one level of learning to the next, in a series of organized steps. Schools may have designed curriculums for the gifted in the performing arts, physical education, or social studies on a K–12 basis. A program, therefore, is bigger than one teacher and wider than one group of youngsters at one grade level or in one building. It is directed toward the systematic accomplishment of long-range goals.

The distinction between provisions and programs is one between piecemeal, uncoordinated, short-range efforts and comprehensive, coordinated, long-range efforts intended to develop the abilities and competencies of gifted and talented pupils from identification to graduation.

Whether they are placed in special classes, kept in regular classes or served by other administrative and organizational arrangements, the important point is that the attention given to the gifted and tal-

ented should be comprehensively planned, systematic, and focused upon their individual needs.

Goals and Objectives

The approaches to educating the gifted should be based upon the goals which are particularly appropriate for the gifted. The gifted should be prepared for responsible and productive roles in a democratic society through the process of developing realistic and healthy self-concepts. They should be intellectually alive, creatively capable and independent life-long learners who also have the capacity to be compassionate human beings. Without developing a positive self-image, even the most talented child will have difficulty reaching his potential. An enthusiasm for learning and for trying new experiences are attitudes to be encouraged by educators. The gifted can be expected to achieve in these areas to an extraordinary degree—beyond that of other children and youth.

These broad goals can be translated into more specific goal statements which guide the selection of curriculum content, teaching strategies and instructional materials for educating the gifted and talented:

- *Superior Achievement*—Gifted and talented youngsters should have ample opportunities to realize their potential to the fullest extent possible.
- *Self-Directedness*—The freedom, responsibility and capability to manage one's time is an important ingredient of self-fulfillment and productivity.
- *Acceptance of Responsibility*—The leadership capabilities of gifted and talented pupils implies increased responsibilities to self, home and society.
- *Creative Thinking and Expression*—This goal seeks the development of creativity in a rich variety of constructive ways.
- *Aesthetic Awareness*—This goal focuses upon the development of positive feelings toward things of beauty and consequence.
- *Acceptance of Divergent Views*—This goal views tolerance for divergent thought as an aid to learning.
- *Pursuit of Alternative Solutions*—This focus is on development of patterns of thinking which seek alternate solutions to problems prior to action. It seeks the development of a capacity for reasoning and effective decision making.
- *Commitment to Inquiry*—The development of a pattern of thinking is stressed which continually questions, probes, tests and investigates.
- *Preparation for Satisfying Life-Styles and Career*—The need for a gifted and talented person to enter into a career which is commensurate with his abilities, interests, and spiritual satisfaction is underscored.

Progress toward the above goals by the gifted can be made by identifying programmatic objectives which differentiate the approach for the gifted from the approach used for the general school population.

Differentiating the Curriculum for the Gifted and Talented

A curriculum for the gifted and talented should encompass elements which distinguish it from a curriculum for all children. Whatever the nature of the specific content may be, the curriculum for the gifted and talented should be process-oriented and focus upon conceptual development through processes of:

- *inquiry*—observing, experimenting, criticizing, and evaluating
- *creative and productive thinking*—producing many and varied responses; new or original responses; elaborating on a response; generating new ideas
- *aesthetic expression*—developing creativity through activities with the visual and performing arts
- *problem solving*—defining the problem, obtaining evidence, analyzing, synthesizing, hypothesizing, validating and evaluating.

Differentiated curricular approaches for the gifted and talented may be achieved by means of:

- accelerated or advanced content and processes
- a higher degree of complexity of content
- introduction of content and skills in addition to that in the prescribed curriculum
- student-selected content and skills according to personal interests
- working with abstract concepts in a content area
- multiple learning resources
- creating or generating new products, processes or ideas
- transferring and applying learning to other areas of greater challenge
- fostering personal growth or sophistication in attitudes, appreciations and feelings
- styling and implementing a student study design.

Differentiated Approaches For Special Groups

Early identification and special programming should be developed for the benefit of young children. Often children have been identified as gifted and talented and permitted to enter school early. Studies of early entrance in Pennsylvania, Nebraska, Massachusetts,

Minnesota, and Illinois all indicate that younger children did as well as older children, were as well accepted, and progressed satisfactorily. Once gifted and talented children have been identified, individualized programs should be developed which enable them to meet their needs.

In the planning for programming, the special needs of gifted children with high potential from disadvantaged groups should be taken into consideration. Although these children have innate abilities, they may not be identified because of stereotypes, inadequate basic skills, inappropriate classroom behavior, problems with the English language, behavior based on cultural patterns that deviate from the school norm, or interests and talents not recognized or appreciated by teachers.

PREPARING THE STAFF

The teacher is the key to meeting the needs of the gifted and talented. The strength of a program lies in the skills, abilities and attitudes of the professionals responsible for identifying gifted pupils, planning and organizing the learning environment, and facilitating learning. Special skills and sensitivities to the social, emotional and intellectual requirements of the gifted and talented are needed.

Because of personal characteristics, attitudes, interests and professional background, some people will be more suited than others to work with these children. All teachers of the gifted and talented need not be gifted persons, but they must be secure and self-confident enough to accept a child's superior capabilities in an area and encourage even greater achievement. Imagination and curiosity are necessary qualities if the teacher is to be able to recognize, appreciate and encourage them in others. A teacher of the gifted needs a broad academic education as well as outstanding professional expertise in order to serve as facilitator, questioner, stimulator and guide. Organizational and planning skills are required to implement a comprehensive, balanced, flexible program which does not restrict the student's pursuit of knowledge or special interests. Individuals who demonstrate respect for the uniqueness, wide range of ideas, varied contributions and potential capabilities of the gifted and talented contribute much to the child's education.

Thus, children who have unique educational needs must have these needs understood and addressed if these children are to be helped in growing toward their fullest potential. Such growth depends, in large measure, upon the competence of educators to cope effectively with the challenges of educating such children and youth.

In order to improve their competence to deal effectively with the problems of identifying and nurturing the gifted and talented, educators must be provided with specialized preservice and inservice preparation programming. Support of the need for increased awareness and of the need for increased competence on the part of educators to meet the educational needs of the gifted and talented is reflected in a United States Office of Education study (1969–70) which indicated that 57.5 percent of the schools in a sample in the United States reported that they had no gifted and talented pupils in attendance. Unquestionably, the study reveals a failure on the part of educators to identify gifted and talented pupils let alone nurture their development.

For years, however, educators and the general public have been made increasingly aware of the unique needs of children who have handicapping conditions. As a result, special efforts have been made to prepare teachers and other educators to deal with the unique problems of educating such children. Not only do our schools and BOCES offer specialized programs appropriate for these children, but many of our colleges and universities have departments of special education which offer programs for teachers of handicapped children.

Gifted and talented pupils are also exceptional and have unique educational needs which must be understood and appropriately addressed if they are to grow toward their fullest potential. Special efforts now need to be made to prepare teachers and other educators to deal with the unique problems of educating the gifted and talented. In order to develop the competence required for identifying and nurturing the gifted and talented and for organizing and developing appropriate approaches to facilitate their learning, educators need effective teacher preparation and inservice programming.

ALLOCATING RESOURCES

Many New York State schools have made important efforts to meet the needs of the gifted and talented but further efforts are needed to extend and intensify progress in terms of cost effectiveness and program development. Human and nonhuman resources, at all levels, are needed to provide the gifted and talented with educational opportunities for their total emotional, intellectual and social development.

While new sources of funding are needed to accomplish this task, careful reassessment of the total resources presently available to school districts, BOCES, colleges and universities and the State Education Department could result in a reasonable portion being reallocated to improve the education of the gifted.

In addition, more economical ways of providing services to the gifted might be realized without any loss of quality. Although the Regents realize that local districts have direct responsibility for identifying and developing programs for the gifted and talented, they also support collaborative efforts by local school districts, BOCES, colleges, universities and the State Education Department. There are many organizational options available. For example, more effective use of BOCES services, in which two or more component school districts share, deserves consideration. At present, an organization of instructional materials centers exist across the State to support the efforts of classroom teachers and other educators who work with handicapped children. The local centers offer training to teachers and have on hand a wide range of instructional materials. Regardless of the organizational models employed, regional resource, development and demonstration centers offer the potential to provide services and programming for the gifted and talented in an effective manner.

Another Regents positon paper, *The Articulation of Secondary and Postsecondary Education (No. 21)*, published in August 1974, is addressed to the needs of a broader spectrum of students than the gifted and talented. The paper, however, is of special significance to the overall problem of educating the gifted and talented because its major thrust suggests *optional* ways of providing intellectual stimulation and challenge particularly appropriate for the gifted and talented. The articulation paper recommends that the school districts, the BOCES, and the colleges and universities initiate immediate action to see how the articulation of secondary and postsecondary education can be effectively applied to the education of the gifted and talented. We think it is appropriate to reaffirm that recommendation in this paper.

The recommendations which follow are offered to the educational community and the general public in order to increase the level of collaborative action and public support. The Regents reaffirm their concern and commitmemt for meeting the needs of the State's gifted children and youth. The Regents now invite all concerned citizens, educators and laymen alike, public agencies and private groups to join us in the effort to promote more equitable opportunities for the State's gifted and talented.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Board of Regents believes that the following recommendations will promote more equitable opportunity for the State's gifted and talented pupils:

1. The Regents recommend that local boards of education and administrators develop policy statements and administrative guidelines that will assure that the gifted and talented pupils in their schools receive an education appropriate to their needs.
2. The Regents recommend that school districts establish districtwide committees to develop procedures for early screening and identification of the gifted and talented. Annual reports should be submitted to the local boards of education which indicate the progress being made in identifying gifted and talented pupils and in developing programs to serve their needs.
3. The Regents recommend that school district plans include strategies to identify and encourage those gifted and talented pupils who may be disadvantaged because of race, ethnic origin, language barriers, handicapping conditions, sex, a rural or urban environment or economic deprivation.
4. The Regents recommend that school districts prepare comprehensive plans which will provide opportunities to the gifted and talented. These plans should use resources available locally, in cooperation with other schools, with BOCES, with postsecondary school institutions and other organizations. Once identified, gifted and talented pupils need educational programming that takes into account their emotional and social development along with their intellectual needs.
5. The Regents recommend that competent and concerned staff be selected as teachers of the gifted. The services of the BOCES, colleges and universities, private organizations and other groups, as well as gifted individuals in the local community should be used in providing inservice and preservice opportunities for the professional staff.
6. The Regents recommend that the local boards of education take the initiative in increasing cooperation among schools, BOCES, colleges and universities, the State Education Department, business, industry, labor, teachers' associations,

parents and concerned citizens in order to provide gifted and talented pupils with the variety of optional learning environments that they need for their growth and development.

7. The Regents recommend that a statewide organization of regional resource development and demonstration centers, such as the system of instructional materials centers used to train teachers and provide resources in connection with special education, be developed to serve the needs of gifted and talented pupils.
8. The State Education Department will provide a commitment of staff and resources in order to develop materials and creative teaching practices that will assist the school districts in developing approaches both in the curriculums that the gifted and talented pursue, and in the mode and styles in which they approach learning.
9. The State Education Department will review provisions of federally funded programs under departmental control and administration, and determine what amount of program funds, available for pupils who are disadvantaged, migrant, non-English dominant, or physically handicapped, can be used to support statewide programs for the gifted and talented.
10. The State Education Department will use the results of a statewide survey on the status of educational programs for the gifted as the initial step in the preparation of a comprehensive long-range State plan to implement the policies stated in this paper.